

NEWS RELEASE

From the Brodhead Watershed Association

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Buck Hill Conservation Foundation owns a conservation easement which encompasses the beloved Buck Hill Falls. (BHCF photo)

Buck Hill protects forests for the future

Editor's note: "Woods and Water" is a new occasional feature focusing on the relation between land and water quality – and the conservation easements that help preserve our environment in the Brodhead watershed.

By Carol Hillestad

For Brodhead Watershed Association

By nature conservative, Frank May considers protecting forested land to be a distinctly conservative activity. "Ginny and I were among the first members of Buck Hill Conservation Foundation," he says, even before they moved to the community full time. In the 20-plus years since, the group's work has protected 1,000 acres of forestland in Barrett Township, Pa. — including one of the last stands of old-growth forest in the Poconos.

"Healthy, intact forests provide measurable benefits," May says. "Trails and habitat are part of it." But he adds that "stands of trees, especially older, larger trees, moderate climate change naturally." The causes of climate change are complicated — but among the gases that trap dangerous levels of heat in our world, carbon dioxide is the stand-out culprit.

Throughout their lives, trees guzzle carbon dioxide from the air, trap the carbon and store it in wood and soil. The bigger the tree, the more carbon it is able to trap and store. Protecting and managing forests to remove CO2 from the air is less costly than other methods — and, at the same time, this natural process results in cleaner water and purer air.

At Buck Hill Falls, conserving and protecting forested land is built into the community's history.

In 1901, its founders acquired an expanse of Pocono woodland to become a place that they, their families and future generations could enjoy. Residents today are beneficiaries and stewards of that legacy, now comprising 4,600 acres. Buck Hill Creek, Griscom Creek, Spruce Run, the Middle Branch, and the Leavitt Branch — all headwaters creeks of the Brodhead — drain this land. Except for the Middle Branch, which rises in a wetland below Mount Wismer, all rise in the rich, old, peaty wetlands high on the Pocono Plateau.

These waters then plunge steeply off the highlands in rocky cascades, cold and pure, home to breeding populations of native trout, before coming together in Canadensis, forming the Brodhead.

Over the years, Buck Hill Conservation Foundation has taken on many projects, in addition to acquiring and protecting land, such as defending hemlocks from the woolly adelgid, managing the former site of the historic Inn at Buck Hill Falls, partnering with local government on

public open spaces, and working with Brodhead Watershed Association to protect water quality in streams.

A crown jewel of its work is Chestnut Mountain Preserve, 478 acres of woodland which are open to the public and offer four miles of blazed trails — and a view of Delaware Water Gap.

“This project alone was almost 20 years in the making,” May says.

A little farther along the plateau, almost five miles of challenging trails have recently been opened on the adjacent Spruce Mountain, a 398-acre preserve protected by a conservation easement.

When asked about future plans, now-President Emeritus May says he expects to continue as an adviser to Buck Hill Conservation Foundation.

“We are in the early days of talking with The Nature Conservancy, for instance, about enrolling the forest here in their Working Woodlands program,” he says. “It will take time. But when you’re thinking about forests, you need patience. Some of the trees here are 300 years old. We humans have to take the long view.”

ABOUT BUCK HILL CONSERVATION FOUNDATION

The foundation was formed in 1993 and is a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation. Foundation trustees include residents of Buck Hill Falls and three members from the wider community. See buckhillconservation.org.

ABOUT CONSERVING FORESTED LAND

In addition to conservation easements (info at phlt.org and weconservepa.org), special programs exist for large tracts of forested lands. These can provide benefits to smaller landowners, including assistance in developing a forest management plan and certifying their woodlands in order to increase income by selling carbon credits.

Family Forests is a program for owners of forestland from 20 to 1,000 acres, a partnership between The Nature Conservancy and the American Forest Foundation. See forestfoundation.org/family-forest-carbon-program

Working Woodlands is intended for properties of at least 2,000 acres. It is administered by The Nature Conservancy. See nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/united-states/working-woodlands/

ABOUT SPRUCE MOUNTAIN TRAILS

Five miles of new, challenging trails are accessible from Chestnut Mountain Preserve, off Route 191 north of Mountainhome. Though open to the public, hikers are asked to contact Buck Hill Falls Co. at 570-595-7511 to log their hiking plans for safety.

Carol Hillestad is a hike leader and writer for Get Outdoors Poconos, a grant-funded series administered by Brodhead Watershed Association. Go to brodheadwatershed.org/gopoconos for information on this as well as other preserved lands and hiking areas in the Get Outdoors Poconos series. The series is administered by Brodhead Watershed Association and supported by a grant from the William Penn Foundation.

Brodhead Watershed Association is a nonprofit environmental organization formed in 1989. BWA is dedicated to protecting and preserving water resources and the environment of the Brodhead watershed, and the water quality of the Brodhead, Cherry, Marshalls, McMichael, Paradise and Pocono creeks and their tributaries. BWA assists municipalities, residents, businesses and groups with protecting natural resources through education, workshops, seminars, public programs and stream monitoring. For information: info@brodheadwatershed.org or 570-839-1120.

